

The Cross of Fire

A Dramatic Cantata

Founded on an incident in Sir Walter Scott's
"Lady of the Lake"

For Soli, Chorus and Orchestra
(with Organ ad libitum)

Poem by Heinrich Bluthaupt

English version by Henry G. Chapman

[Das Feuerkreuz, Act.
arr. for piano]

Music
by
Max Bruch
Op. 52

Vocal Score
Edited by Frank Damrosch
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P r e f a c e

Long after the introduction of Christianity, and down to the early Middle Ages, there still survived in the Highlands of Scotland a singular heathen custom. When one clan declared war upon another, the chief, with solemn ceremonies, consecrated the so-called "Cross of Fire." A cross of yew was set on fire at an altar and quenched in the blood of a sacrificed goat; it was then given to a messenger of noble birth, whose duty it was to carry it with all possible speed to the next post, and there hand it on to a second messenger, who must also be a noble. This one must then carry it on without delay till he could deliver it to a third, and so on. In this way the Cross of Fire went the round of the whole country, in the shortest possible time, as a signal of war, and rallied to the flag every man-at-arms who saw it and responded to the call to battle.

The present poem is founded on this custom, which Sir Walter Scott has made use of in his "Lady of the Lake."

Argument

Accompanied by Highland warriors and dames, 'mid the festive sounds of marriage music, *Norman*, a young Highlander of noble birth, and his bride *Mary*, a noble maiden, are sailing across a lake to celebrate their nuptials at a neighboring mountain chapel (No. 1). The notes of an organ and festal shouts greet the wedding train as it lands on the shore, and to the sound of a marriage anthem approaches the church (No. 2). Just as the ceremony is about to begin, *Angus*, the messenger, bursts in, announces that war has broken out and hands over to *Norman* the Cross of Fire, at the chief's behest, as a signal of war, with the command that he carry it on. *Norman* brokenheartedly takes leave of his bride and rushes away with the Cross of Fire in his hand. The men seize their arms and hasten to the rendezvous, while the women surround *Mary*, speaking words of comfort (No. 3). The next scene (No. 4) describes *Norman's* emotions while engaged in the fulfilment of his task. True to the command of his chief and the dictates of honor, he has carried forward the Cross, till now, torn by conflicting emotions, he sinks exhausted on a lonely path in the mountains. But soon his sense of duty is victorious, and the hope that he will return as a conqueror, and hold his beloved for ever in his arms, lends

wings to his feet anew. While the Chorus (which at this point assumes the rôle of narrator) is following his distant course with the mind's eye and describing the effect of the fiery cross upon the people, *Norman* comes to the end of his journey. In No 6 (*Ave Maria*) are expressed the emotions of the bride who has been left alone. No. 7 (War-song) shows us *Norman* full of heroic emotion at the head of the Highland warriors, whom by the ancient battle-cry of "Clan Alpine!" he rouses to the highest pitch of bravery. In the *Finale* (No. 8) *Mary* and her women are standing on the top of a hill, from which, with the deepest interest, they watch the changing phases of the battle so evenly fought. Fleeing men-at-arms spread fear and dismay among the women by shouting that *Norman* has fallen and that the battle is lost; but soon sounds of victory are heard approaching—*Norman's* heroic valor has secured a victory, and won for the lovers a most happy reunion, amid the joyous shouts of warriors and the celebrations of the populace.

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*I*N order to facilitate the reading at sight of the choruses in this work by choirs which are accustomed to the use of the "movable do," the modulations have been indicated by placing figures above the notes wherever the transition from one key to another takes place.

Chromatic tones have also been provided with figures designating their position in the tonality.

Thus, on page 2 the modulation from E major to C major is indicated thus :

The musical notation consists of four staves, each with a treble or bass clef and a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). The notation shows a sequence of notes with figures above them indicating the transition. The figures are: E 8, C 3, 3 (top staff); E b7, C 2, 1 (second staff); E #3, C #5, 5 (third staff); E 1, C 3, 3 (bottom staff).

It is believed that this will be of great assistance to many choral societies, and will tend towards a more intelligent study of the work, while interfering in no wise with the usual reading of the notes by those who read by interval, "fixed do," or by intuition(!).

FRANK DAMROSCH.